

Background — Niagara Escarpment Plan 5-year review

ABOUT THE ESCARPMENT

The Niagara Escarpment Plan Area stretches 725 kilometres from Queenston, near Niagara Falls, to the islands off Tobermory at the tip of the Bruce Peninsula. The escarpment reaches a height of 510 metres in some locations.

It was formed 450 million years ago along the shore of a shallow tropical sea that covered a vast area of Ontario and Michigan.

Skeletons of primitive sea creatures and debris from ancient mountains were compressed into massive layers of reef and sedimentary rock. Over succeeding millions of years, erosion from glaciers, ancient rivers and lakes, and the elements sculpted the rock layers into their present form.

Today, it is one of the largest remaining wooded areas in southern Ontario. It also contains a rich variety of farms, recreational areas, scenic views, wildlife habitats, historic sites, villages, towns and cities. The cedar trees hugging the face of the escarpment constitute an old growth forest with some trees, though small, found to be over 700 years old.

In 1990, the escarpment was designated as a World Biosphere Reserve by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

THE NIAGARA ESCARPMENT PLAN

The Niagara Escarpment and lands in its vicinity — 183,000 hectares or 1,830 square kilometres in eight counties and regions and 37 local municipalities — are regulated by the Niagara Escarpment Plan. This Plan, established in 1985, is administered by the Niagara Escarpment Commission, a provincial government agency which reports to the Ministry of Environment and Energy.

The Niagara Escarpment Plan was first approved in 1985. Under the Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act, the Plan was subject to review after five years in operation. A Plan review document, prepared by the Commission, was the subject of 86 days and seven evenings of public hearings by a two-person hearing panel during 1991 and 1992. During the hearings, in Burlington and Owen Sound, 183 witnesses appeared and 458 exhibits were presented.

The hearing officers' report was released in March 1993. The Commission then released its response to this report and submitted its proposed plan to Environment and Energy Minister Bud Wildman.

Mr. Wildman accepted most of the hearing panel's Plan-related recommendations. In March 1994, he released for public review the recommendations he has made to Cabinet which differ from the hearing officers' report. These variances are subject to a 30-day period of public review and comment.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PUBLIC REVIEW

The Minister's recommendations which constitute significant variations from those of the hearing officers include:

- Accepting recommendations to retain and expand existing mineral resource (aggregate) policy, but calling for an aggregate study to be completed within 18 months of plan approval.
- Deleting plans of subdivision as a permitted use in the Escarpment Rural Area.
- Restricting new severances in the Escarpment Protection Area and limiting severances to one lot per hundred acres in the Escarpment Rural Area.
- More stringent development criteria for recreational ponds.
- Deleting golf courses as a permitted use in the Escarpment Protection Area.

Anyone who wishes to comment on the minister's recommendations must do so before 5:00 p.m. April 25, 1994, by delivering or mailing submissions to:

Clerk of the Executive Council
Province of Ontario
Room 4440, Whitney Block
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